



American Philological Association

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Source: *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 97 (1966), pp. 583-595

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2936031>

Accessed: 11-10-2016 18:44 UTC

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“NATURE” IN ROMAN LINGUISTIC TEXTS

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The word “nature” and its derivatives, which occur frequently in Latin grammatical and rhetorical texts, often puzzle the thoughtful reader. Ordinarily one passes lightly over the adjective “natural” with the assumption that its denotation is obvious. But when technical features of language are characterized as “natural,” the usual associations with the expression are so inappropriate that a need for closer study becomes unmistakably clear. An analysis of the passages containing the terms reveals the presence of different, though not wholly independent, kinds of nature. This paper undertakes to show the part played in the linguistic texts by the triad of natures that relate to the cosmos, to man, and to language, and so to disclose the various meanings of “nature” and the thread of association that ties them together.

I. COSMIC NATURE

The cosmic rôle of Nature in linguistic texts, though ostensibly small, is nevertheless a major one. In fact, the goddess whom the Stoics identified with the cosmos directs all the vital action from behind the scenes. Her influence is constantly felt, even when her voice is not heard and when nature in some humbler guise is in the foreground.¹

¹ Priscian offers one example of how Nature in its grander aspects provides man with a directly instructive demonstration. The linguistically significant concept of futurity, he tells us in the following passage, is developed in part by our realization, based on past experience, that the sun, now setting, will rise again (H. Keil, *Grammatici Latini* 2 [Leipzig 1860] 423.2–8 [The publication of the seven volumes extended over the period 1857–80. The work will be cited hereafter as *GL*.]): “De futuro quoque sumimus notionem . . . natura, ut cum videam solem occidentem in praesenti, possum scire naturali motu reversurum, quod est futuri.”

2. THE NATURE OF MAN

That a connection exists between human nature and nature in a cosmic sense is self-evident since man is part of the universe. The Romans, influenced especially by Stoic ideas, sometimes sound as anthropocentric as *Genesis*. Cicero, for instance, writes in the *De legibus* (1.8.25): "So great is the abundance which Nature has lavishly provided for the convenience and use of men that those things which are brought to birth (*gignuntur*) appear given to us on purpose, not born by chance." A little later in the same passage (1.9.26), Cicero says that this Nature has adorned man with quickness of mind, with senses to serve his reason, and with a body conformable to his needs. At the other extreme, the Epicurean Lucretius is as fiercely anti-teleological as can be. But all alike speak of, or imply, some relationship of man to the cosmos, and regard the power of speech as a mark of man's uniqueness. On this latter point the linguistic texts are in full agreement.

Speech is generally understood as a natural gift which can belong only to a creature endowed with reason. Quintilian couples *ratio* and *oratio* as the two possessions which constitute the distinctive excellence, the *virtus* (*ἀρετή*) of man (2.20.9; cf. Cicero, *De officiis* 1.16.50). Similarly, the grammarian Diomedes discovers human *proprietas*, the feature which separates man from other animals, in the rational power of speech, the *expressa ratio sermonis* (GL 1.300.12–14). Varro (LL 9.30) follows the Stoics Zeno (fr. 143 Von Arnim) and Chrysippus (fr. 827, 828 Von Arnim) in calling the speech-making faculty one of the eight parts of the soul, along with the five physical senses and the rational and the generative powers.

One of the most recurrent problems about human nature concerns the relationship between nature and art which, as a human product, is inevitably relevant to man. In the *De legibus* (1.8.26), with its philosophical orientation, Nature is called man's teacher in devising the arts. By imitation of Nature, the argument goes, reason has achieved what is necessary for life. This Nature, instructing man by example, is the cosmic Stoic goddess. The view expressed here is complemented by Cicero's aesthetic criticism in the *Brutus* (18.69–71), which implicitly defines the *τέλος* of the artist as the successful imitation of

the nature external to himself.² Nature in the broadest sense is, then, for Cicero, both the model and the goal of art.

That the topic of art and nature should be prominent even in linguistic texts is not surprising since *grammatica* and *rhetorica* are *artes*, the raw material of which is man's natural gift of speech. The common opinion of the grammarians and rhetoricians is that art proceeds from the nature of man³ with the function of refining, supplementing, and enriching man himself and his total environment. In regard to language specifically, Pompeius states that our ancestors devised pronouns in order to avoid the tedium which would result from excessive repetition of nouns (*GL* 5.199.21-23). Conjunctions, he explains, are to prevent discourse (*oratio*) from being loose and disjointed as it would be naturally (*naturaliter*) (*GL* 5.264.17-19). Priscian points out that grammar substitutes existing forms for those that do not exist naturally in Latin (*GL* 2.565.11-24). In other words, human ingenuity has made up for the defective nature of language.

Considerable effort is made to deny a basic antagonism between the natural and the artful. Even in the unselfconscious speech of the untutored, the rudiments of rhetorical ornament may be perceived.⁴

² I interpret Cicero's *veritas* in this passage as "naturalism." Various connotations of *veritas* are related to *natura*, and in each specific context the precise meanings of both words must be considered. In the *Brutus* (44.162), for example, Cicero characterizes Crassus' speeches as follows: "In his omnibus inest quidam sine ullo fuco, veritatis color." This sentence may usefully be compared with the preceding discussion of the great age of Attic orators, "in qua naturalis inesset, non fucatus nitor" (*Brutus* 9.36). The juxtaposition of these two passages suggests that *veritas* sometimes implies the appearance of being natural and free from obviously artificial adornment. *Veritas* here is the quality of being "real" in the sense of "true to life." When used in this way, *veritas* has a close association with the concept of *usus* as applied to style (see below, note 12). Respect for *usus* leads to the avoidance of such rhetorical display as would create an impression of pedantry or "artiness"—remoteness from the concerns of everyday life. For another association of *veritas* and *natura*, see below, p. 589.

³ There is an intelligent awareness on the part of some authors that the theory of the art is largely based on inference from the observation of what is done naturally, i.e. without formal instruction. In other words, the texts are sometimes regarded as descriptive rather than normative. So Quintilian states (3.2.3): "Initium ergo dicendi dedit natura, initium artis observatio." Cf. Quintilian 8. *Prooem.* 12: "Materia quidem varia est, et in qua multa etiam sine doctrina praestare debeat per se ipsa natura, ut haec de quibus dixi non tam inventa a praeceptoribus quam, cum fierent, observata esse videantur."

⁴ When an exact term is missing to denote an object, an action, or a situation, the speaker transposes the most nearly appropriate word, and what one might call "natural

"So like, as a rule, is nature to art," Quintilian comments (8.3.86). He is critical of those romantic "primitivists" who oppose the artful cultivation of nature, and regards art and technology as themselves natural in the sense that they are the normal outgrowth of a natural human capacity (9.4.3-5). Marius Victorinus argues in the same vein that the fashioning of the arts is as natural to man as his most unpremeditated responses and as the instincts in animals (*GL* 6.158.1-159.2).

The function of *doctrina*, as Aquila Romanus expresses it, is to make readily available to man those skills which sometimes manifest themselves spontaneously but in a haphazard manner (17, p. 27 Halm). In other words, art gives man firm and actual control over the potentialities of human nature. The relationship between the two is neither linear nor simple.

All the authors agree that art cannot compensate for a fundamental deficiency in native human ability, *ingenium*.⁵

3. THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

Since we are dealing primarily with texts written in Latin about Latin grammar and rhetoric, it is often unclear whether a specific passage is intended as a comment on language in general or on Latin in particular. That the Roman authors had a certain amount of sophistication about language is beyond question. They realized that their own linguistic and stylistic theory were largely derived from the Greek, and that Greek differed in some respects from Latin. They also knew about the existence of other languages less closely related. It would have been virtually impossible not to be at least dimly conscious of linguistic diversity at the time of the Roman Empire. Many of the grammarians and rhetoricians whom we properly call Roman because of their citizenship, and sometimes because of their residence in the city, were natives of provinces where they would have heard Celtic or Semitic

metaphor" is the result. The following passage of Cicero provides an illustration (*De oratore* 3.155; cf. *Orator* 24.81; Quintilian 8.6.6; Martianus Capella 4.359, 5.512): "Tertius ille modus transferendi verbi late patet, quem necessitas genuit inopia coacta et angustiis, post autem iucunditas delectatioque celebravit. . . . Nam gemmare vitis, luxuriem esse in herbis, laetas segetes etiam rustici dicunt. Quod enim declarari vix verbo proprio potest, id translato cum est dictum, inlustrat id quod intellegi volumus, eius rei quam alieno verbo posuimus similitudo."

⁵ *Ingenium*, "that which is inborn," is from the same root as *natura*.

dialects, for example. In the fourth and fifth centuries, a period from which a number of our surviving *artes grammaticae* date, some grammarians were motivated to write their texts precisely in order to rescue Latin from the devastating influence of the barbarian invasions. They knew only too well that Latin was not the only language in the world.

When distinctive qualities of Latin are being emphasized, the grammatical and rhetorical works cite only Greek for purposes of contrast.⁶ Thus, to underscore the special nature of Latinity, grammarians sometimes added sections of *idiomata* to their texts. Charisius defines *idiomata* as "everything which we express in our way and not according to the Greeks. But to be brief, they consist either in the genders of nouns which are different in Latin from the Greek (for when we say *hic honor*, ἡ τιμή, we use masculine gender and they feminine); or in opposite voices of verbs, for example, *luctor*, παλαίω. This word has a passive form in Latin, an active in Greek. Likewise in the other parts of speech, there is a great divergence of idioms" (p. 379 Barwick).

The Romans also realized that certain kinds of words and stylistic techniques were suitable and pleasant in Greek but not in Latin. Quintilian warns that attempts at onomatopoeia, so effective in the Homeric λίγξε βίος and σίζεν ὀφθαλμός (1.5.72; cf. 8.3.30), are out of place in Latin. He ridicules the Latin compound *incurvicervicum* as an unbecoming imitation of the Greek κυρταύχενα. Most significantly he comments: "But this whole process is more fitting for the Greeks; it turns out less well for us. Nor do I think that it is practiced according to nature (*nec id fieri natura puto*)" (1.5.70). In its context, this *natura* appears to mean "the distinctive nature of the Latin language."

⁶ One reason for the choice of Greek, aside from the fact that it was part of the established curriculum in Roman education, is that the Latin authors recognize a close kinship between the two languages. In fact, this relationship is sometimes so expressed as to indicate a closer tie than actually exists (cf. Charisius 380.21–22 Barwick: "Cum ab omni sermone Graeco Latina lingua pendere videatur. . . ." Cf. Diomedes, *GL* 1.311.3–4). Another explanation for the exclusive choice of Greek is provided by the belief in the essential superiority of Greek and Latin to all other languages. Some of the ancients had a kind of cultural chauvinism, intensified by the military and political events of the late Empire. The following statement of Macrobius, addressed to his friend Symmachus, is both characteristic and enlightening (*GL* 5.631.7–11): "Cum vel natura vel usus loquendi linguas gentium multiplici diversitate variasset, ceteris aut anhelitu aut sibilo explicantibus loqui suum, solis graecae latinaeque et soni leporem et artis disciplinam atque in ipsa loquendi mansuetudine similem cultum et coniunctissimam cognationem dedit."

The references in our texts, whether to the nature of language generically speaking or to *the* language, Latin, may be grouped under the topics of sounds, words, and connected speech. At least one point concerns individual sounds, namely, the question of possible natural association between a word and what it denotes (see below, note 14). It is argued by some that individual sounds can communicate what might be called their natural emotional or descriptive qualities. Such impressions as smoothness or roughness, vigor, motion, or position are said to be inherent in the sounds themselves, which are thus semantically appropriate for some words but not for others. This theory, expounded by Socrates to Hermogenes in the *Cratylus* (426C), became part of the Stoic system of etymology. It is taken up by some of the Latin writers, including Gellius (2.3.1–4) and St. Augustine who, in Chapter 6 of the *Principia dialecticae*, summarizes Stoic views on the origin of words.⁷

One quality of sounds, the natural quantity of vowels and of syllables, was so familiar to the native speaker of Latin that it formed part of the cultural heritage to which he was born. In our idiom, it was second nature to him, and he did not have to study it in school to know about it, at least in practice. Cicero mentions in the *Orator* (51.173) that the average theatre-goer could tell intuitively if a syllable had been pronounced with the wrong quantity, for “iudicium ipsa natura in auribus nostris conlocavit,” i.e. “Nature herself has placed the power of judgment in our ears.” The nature mentioned here may be the teleological cosmic goddess, but it may also be the nature of her creature, man, a rational being whose brain, served by his senses, spontaneously engages in aesthetic criticism.⁸

⁷ For a good discussion of Augustine’s work and of other points related to this paper, see K. Barwick, *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik* = *Abh. der sächs. Akad. der Wissensch. zu Leipzig* 49.3 (1957).

⁸ The ability of the untrained man as a judge of matters related to style is brought up repeatedly. So in the *De oratore* (3.50.195), Crassus mentions natural human ability to evaluate speech, including quantities, rhythm, and the qualities of sound (on sense of rhythm, cf. Quintilian 9.4.9–13).

The effect of man’s biological nature in the production as well as the judgment of speech is discussed in connection with the sentence. The limitations of breath bring about a natural end to the flow of words, so that a sentence cannot extend beyond a certain length (cf. Crassus in *De oratore* 3.47.182: “Longissima est igitur complexio verborum quae volvi uno spiritu potest”). The Auctor shows the biological necessity imposed upon hearer and speaker alike when he says (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.18):

Various forms or pronunciations are explained by considerations of euphony. So Cicero notes that the *i* in the preposition *in* is long when compounded with a word with an initial *f* or *s*. He begins with the question, "What shows a finer sense of discrimination than this practice, which is observed not according to nature (*natura*), but according to custom (*quodam instituto*)?" The *natura* in this context refers to the nature of the language. In other words, the *i* in the preposition *in* is short by nature. The technical account of the circumstances under which *i* is pronounced long is then followed by the comment: "Consule veritatem: reprehendet; refer ad auris: probabunt" ("Consult the truth: it will find fault; refer the matter to your ears: they will give approval," *Orator* 159). The *veritas* here, like the *natura* above, refers to the nature of the language, specifically to the natural quantity of the vowel. Considerations of euphony, then, based on man's natural power of aesthetic judgment, sometimes override respect for natural quantity, part of the nature of the language. This passage helps to establish a hierarchy of values. When a conflict arises, the nature of man takes precedence over the nature of language (see the discussion of *usus* in note 12, below).

The associations between nature and words in our sources are many and various. Some of the problems are exceptionally interesting, among other reasons because they were first formulated and argued by the Greek philosophers. The history and the significance of their discussion is called to mind by sets of paired opposites, especially *φύσις* and *νόμος* for the age of the Sophists and Plato, and *φύσις* and *θέσις* for the Hellenistic period.⁹ Steinthal presents a detailed analysis of how these expressions became catch-words, virtually in the manner of political slogans or popular clichés.¹⁰ The precise meaning of *φύσις* must be determined for each author when that is possible.

"Item fugere oportet longam verborum continuationem, quae et auditoris aures et oratoris spiritum laedit."

⁹ Information about one of the more direct Roman survivals of Greek discussion is preserved by Aulus Gellius (10.4), according to whom Nigidius Figulus, Varro's learned contemporary, had championed the cause of *φύσις*, *natura*, against *θέσις*, *positus fortuitus*. As quoted by Gellius, Nigidius seems to explain words as natural in what might be called a mimetic or dramatic sense. Thus the outward-directed motion of lips and breath in pronouncing *vos* and the inward-directed motion in pronouncing *nos* are said to have a natural appropriateness to the meaning of the words.

¹⁰ H. Steinthal, *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft bei den Griechen und Römern*, 2 vols.

A more specifically linguistic debate emerged from the controversy over *φύσις* and *θέσις*, and is known most generally by its own set of antithetical nouns, analogy and anomaly. In this form in the second century B.C., as part of Greek grammatical studies, it was imported into Rome. There its issues were recorded most explicitly and at greatest length in Varro's *De lingua Latina*. In fact, discussion about analogy and anomaly had a widespread influence on the Roman grammatical art. The chief matter at issue in the controversy was the inflectional system, which the analogists felt should be purified of its irregular forms by the *ratio* of grammar. The anomalists preferred to accept the irregularities as they appeared in the current language. In general, the Alexandrian school of grammarians is identified with the cause of analogy and the Stoics with anomaly. The latter, as you will recall, found the ultimate explanation of everything in their cosmic goddess Nature, part of whose *λόγος*, they believed, is present in our language, anomalous as it has become. Since one is conditioned to associate nature primarily with the Stoics, it seems confusing at first to find the word *natura* used technically to denote the regular paradigmatic inflectional system, valued so highly by the Alexandrian opponents of the Stoics. But the mystery is easily solved. The Stoics were essentially interested in cosmic Nature. The nature which governs inflections, however, is the nature of language. The term *declinatio* was used by grammarians to denote either the regular inflection or the formation of words from a stem, for example, by the addition of adjectival suffixes to nouns.¹¹ The latter kind of *declinatio* was termed *voluntaria*, because a certain range of possible alternatives had originally existed from which one form had been chosen. The inflectional type was called *naturalis* because the other forms of the paradigm were "born" from the first form. That is, the paradigm was fixed, and the

(Hildesheim 1961: exact reproduction of 2nd edit. of 1890). This work remains basic in the field. For more recent bibliography, see H. Cherniss, "Plato 1950-1957," *Lustrum* 4 (1959) 75-79. Among studies which supplement Steinthal most usefully is Alfons Nehring's "Plato and the Theory of Language," *Traditio* 3 (1945) 13-48.

As is obvious, I have restricted myself in this paper to a consideration of material in the Latin sources, with only occasional references to the Greek where that becomes most pertinent.

¹¹ Varro, *LL* 8.21-22. The term *derivatio* was sometimes used instead of *declinatio*; cf. Probus, *GL* 4.73.35-38.

inflection automatically followed the existent pattern unless the resulting forms flagrantly violated current usage (*usus* or *consuetudo*).¹² The idea of inevitability or cogency which became associated with the paradigmatic inflection accounts for an antithesis in the meanings of "natural" and "voluntary."¹³

One of the most obvious results of Greek philosophical interest in words is the huge and versatile rôle of etymology in Roman *grammatica*. The Stoic grammarians, avid coiners of etymologies, were concerned about the connection of words with their cosmic Nature.¹⁴ The Alexandrians, on the other hand, concentrated on the formal structure of words, i.e. the nature of the language. Etymological

¹² Varro distinguishes between theory and practice. According to the theoretical *ratio* of linguistic nature and the grammatical art, a form is absolutely predetermined by the pattern of the paradigm. In practice, however, the bond of linguistic coercion may be loosened. In other words, *usus* will, at times, overrule a form which, though technically "correct," would give offence by sounding strange.

The whole concept of *usus* is of the greatest importance. Without it, linguistic theory might deal with language as an independent entity, suspended in a vacuum. Respect for *usus* makes even theorists realize that language is a human institution and exists to serve men. The ancient grammarians were aware that non- or extra-linguistic factors are sometimes decisively influential and that linguistic forms will, in effect, be non-existent if there is no desire or practical use for them. Conversely, if the existing words and forms of language are inadequate to meet the actual need, human ingenuity will devise other forms of expression by substitution or invention. Similarly in regard to style, *usus* acts as a restraining force to check the possible excesses of the rhetorical art. Conspicuous virtuosity, which marks a speech as carefully elaborated and far removed from the language of everyday life, produces in the audience a suspicion that the truth is being concealed (cf. note 2, above).

¹³ This antithesis also occurs in an interesting comment by the grammarian Pompeius on the traditional designation of *cognomina* as "quasi naturalia," a phrase justified on the grounds that *cognomina* "are, as it were, born with us, for they are given to us as soon as we are born" (GL 5.141.21-22). Pompeius himself rejects this explanation, even as a metaphor, and argues that the method of assigning names is determined by alterable choice, not by compulsion. The opposition between "natural" and "voluntary" implied in this instance supports the view that what is natural is felt to be binding.

¹⁴ We have already noted one Stoic type of etymology, first mentioned in the *Cratylus*, which postulates the inherent semantic quality of the individual sound. Onomatopoeia, which provides the most obvious "natural" link between word and object, unfortunately accounts for only a small number of words. At times it becomes necessary for the Stoic grammarian to invoke such principles as similarity or contrariety—i.e. to explain that a name is derived metaphorically (*translate*) from resemblance of the object denoted to some other object, as *crus* ("leg") from *crux* ("cross") because of its length and hardness; or from the opposition of the object denoted to the denoted meaning of another word, as *lucus* ("grove") from *lucere* ("to be light") because a grove is dark. Cf. Augustine, *Principia dialecticae* 6.

activity brought up a number of problems, including the possibility of infinite regression. To prevent frustration, linguistic theorists stated that certain words are *στοιχεῖα* (*Cratylus* 422B) or *elementa*, i.e. linguistic atoms beyond which one cannot go in etymology (Varro, *LL* 6.39). It is to them that Varro refers when he talks about the fourth, highest, and most esoteric stage of the mysteries of etymology (*LL* 5.8). A number of Latin terms are used to designate these irreducible elements, which are sometimes described as “natural,” i.e. original parts of the linguistic organism. They are said to give birth to the derivative forms of the language with which they themselves were “born.”¹⁵

One of the most fascinating questions about words concerns the extent to which the Romans believed that the qualities of Latin and its

¹⁵ Cf. Diomedes (*GL* 1.323.17–20): “Sunt quaedam principalia quae Graeci prototypa dicunt, ut fons mons villa schola hortus. Ex his nascuntur derivativa, quae apud Graecos paragoga dicuntur, ut fontanus montanus villaticus scholasticus horticus.” The word *principalia* is used in the same way elsewhere, e.g. by Pompeius, *GL* 5.143.15–17. Pompeius refers to these nouns as “*primae positionis nomina*.” The expression “*primae positionis*” is used commonly, e.g. by Cledonius (*GL* 5.35.4–5: “*Primae positionis nomina sunt quae dedit natura*”), Servius (*GL* 4.429.17–18), Priscian (*GL* 2.421.26–422.1, in regard to the indicative mood: “et quia prima positio verbi, quae videtur ab ipsa natura esse prolata, in hoc est modo, quemadmodum in nominibus est casus nominativus.” Cf. 427.11–14, where the word *primitiva* is also used).

The term *primigenia* is applied by Varro to verbs (*LL* 6.37: “*Primigenia dicuntur verba ut lego, scribo, sto, sedeo et cetera quae non sunt ab alio quo verbo sed suas habent radices*”) and by Pompeius (*GL* 5.96.29–30) to nouns. These “original” words are called *nativa* by Cicero (*Part. or.* 5.16), who is quoted by Quintilian (8.3.36).

The following observations by Pompeius about adverbs are of unusual interest (*GL* 5.241.24–36):

Adverbia omnia aut a se oriuntur, aut ab aliis partibus veniunt. Plurima sunt adverbia quae naturaliter a se nata sunt, plurima sunt quae aliunde originem ducunt. Naturaliter a se nascuntur ita, cras: numquid habet originem unde veniat? Non habet. Hodie vero habet originem unde veniat, hodie quasi hoc die. Docte habet originem unde nascitur, doctus docte [habet originem]. Ergo sunt quae aliunde originem sumunt. Illa quae a se originem sumunt non possunt habere rationem. Quare? Quia prima origo ratione caret. Idcirco syllabae vel naturaliter longae vel naturaliter breves carent ratione, quoniam prima origo est. Non potest in rationem cadere nisi quod per derivationem fit; quod autem principium originis est non habet rationem. Ergo adverbia illa quae a se nascuntur ratione carent, sed prout inventa fuerint, ita habes dicere. Illa vero quae aliunde originem sumunt, haec in artem veniunt.

Among striking features of this passage is the rather startling expression “naturaliter a se nascuntur” (cf. “a se originem sumunt”). Another noteworthy point is that the *ratio* of the grammatical art deals with the forms derived from these “original” forms but does not try to account for the words which were “born” as a “natural” part of the language.

grammatical categories are natural. "Natural" in this context means "inherent in the nature of language as such and therefore universal." Varro explicitly states that inflection is a universal linguistic feature.¹⁶ There is, in our sources, evidence of belief in the natural origin of linguistic gender, number, voice, and moods.¹⁷ But the grammarians probably had some awareness that significant linguistic features may be arbitrary.¹⁸

Before leaving the subject of nature in reference to words, we should list three technical uses. The term "natural" designates a word that is *simplex* (uncompounded) (cf. Servius, *GL* 4.408.20–22; Pompeius, *GL* 5.169.2–5), *proprium* (applied in its "original," untransposed sense),¹⁹ or part of the Latin lexicon and not a barbarism such as Varro's example *scrimbo* for *scribo* (cited by Diomedes, *GL* 1.439.15–20, and Charisius 62.14–20 Barwick). In the first two cases, the adjective "natural" clearly implies generative force, for compounds are "born"

¹⁶ *LL* 8.3.: "Declinatio inducta in sermones non solum Latinos, sed omnium hominum utili et necessaria de causa: nisi enim ita esset factum, neque discere tantum numerum verborum possemus (infinite enim sunt naturae in quas ea declinantur) neque quae didicissemus ex his quae inter se rerum cognatio esset appareret. At nunc ideo videmus quod simile est quod propagatum." The *naturae* are the inflected forms "born" from the parent form. Note how the terms *cognatio* and *propagatum* strengthen the metaphorical association of *natura* with generation.

¹⁷ Varro (*LL* 9.32–33) indicates the natural origin of three tenses, three persons, and the moods and aspects of the verb: "... similitudines quibus utimur in imperando, quibus in optando, quibus in interrogando, quibus in infectis rebus, quibus in perfectis, sic in aliis discriminibus" (cf. 8.20). On the subject of voice, cf. Servius (*GL* 4.437.27–30), [Sergius] (*GL* 4.503.6–8), Pompeius (*GL* 5.213.24–27). Most of the discussion, as one would anticipate, relates to the connection between nature and gender. Statements on the subject may be found in virtually all of the grammatical works.

Sextus Empiricus argues emphatically against the natural origin of linguistic categories (*Adv. math.* 1.142–54).

¹⁸ Awareness of the arbitrary nature of linguistic categories would have been advanced by close study of languages which differed significantly from Latin. Since, as we have pointed out, the Roman grammarians restricted themselves to a comparative study of Greek, a language with close affinities to Latin, their conclusions are not dramatic or even very clear.

¹⁹ The association of *proprium* with "natural" is evident, e.g. in Quintilian 1.5.71, Gellius 2.6.6., and Martianus Capella 4.358. The explicit connection between *κυριότης* and *φύσις* occurs also in the Greek (cf. Philostratus' *Life of Critias*, cited by Diels, *VS*⁸, vol. 2, p. 371, lines 34–36).

The special virtue of *proprietas* is that it makes meaning clear, and it was therefore highly prized by the Stoics. Cicero, for instance, writes (*Ad fam.* 9.22.1): "... sed, ut dico, placet Stoicis suo quamque rem nomine appellare." Cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.2.6.

from the *simplex*, and metaphorically transposed meanings from the *proprium*.²⁰ As descriptive of a word which is not a barbarism, the term "natural" has a different connotation. *Latinitas*, the composite body of the Latin language, is, in effect, conceived as an organism with its proper members. The hypothetical word *scrimbo* is unnatural in the sense that it simply is not a normal part of *Latinitas* any more than a tusk or a tail is a normal part of the human body.

In connection with words in a context, the possibility of natural word order is sometimes mentioned. Servius speaks of the natural order of words, but he is evidently referring to the logical sequence in which the parts of speech should be treated in an *ars grammatica* (GL 4.406.9–20). Priscian has a little to say on the subject (GL 3.104.14–20), but the only relevant pronouncements seem rather guarded. Such indecisiveness is not surprising, since the variety of word order permitted by an inflectional language does not readily suggest a linguistically natural or necessary sequence.²¹

What conclusions may be drawn after the presentation of such diverse material? Paradoxically, the analysis of the different rôles of nature and the formulation of semantic distinctions result in the inference of a basic unity. To a degree, at least, the many become the one through the relationship of all concepts of nature to the biological implications of the root. Cosmic Nature, the *Genetrix rerum*, is a living being, the fecund source and *paradeigma* of all subsidiary natures. The nature of man, who is a vital part of the cosmos, is the sum of the qualities with which he is born actually or potentially. Among the potential forces in the human infant is the tendency to create the arts, including speech, which develop or are "born" from the original nature with which man is endowed at birth. Finally language, a properly characteristic offshoot of human nature, is itself a kind of metaphorical organism with certain congenital features and with remarkable potency in generating other linguistic forms. The occa-

²⁰ Another association of *verba propria* with birth is indicated by Cicero in this statement (*De oratore* 3.37.149): "Ergo utimur verbis aut eis quae propria sunt et certa quasi vocabula rerum, paene una nata cum rebus ipsis."

²¹ Discussion on "natural order" usually occurs in rhetorical works in connection with the sequence of development of a speech or argument. "Natural" seems to have such various meanings as "chronological" or "reasonable" (i.e. compatible with logic or good judgment).

sionally implied attribute of cogency is consistent with this idea of an organic nature, whose laws cannot be revoked. In case of a conflict between the nature of man and the nature of language, the priority of the properly natural creature over his metaphorically natural creation—a priority implicit in the concept of *usus*—represents a sane hierarchy of values. The analysis of nature in its threefold aspects, then, may be said to have fulfilled its function by explaining the different meanings of "nature" and by showing how they are related to one another. The result, we hope, will be a clearer understanding of our linguistic texts.